United Nations E/CN.3/1999/28

Economic and Social Council

Distr.:General
1 February 1999

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirtieth session
1–5 March 1999
Item 12 of the provisional agenda*
The international institute for statistics proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the proposed international institute for statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the proposed international institute for statistics, which is contained in the annex. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1998) (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 36).

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

99-02593 (E) 170299

Annex

Report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the proposed international institute for statistics

1. As decided by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (10–12 February 1998), an item regarding the proposed international institute for statistics was included on the agenda of the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was invited to prepare a report on it.

2. To begin the process of transforming the current UNESCO Division of Statistics into the proposed international institute for statistics, the UNESCO Director-General decided to constitute an Interim Steering Committee, chaired by J. M. M. Ritzen, former Minister of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands, Special Adviser to the World Bank, to examine proposals and oversee initial actions aimed at achieving this objective. This Committee, which is an open-ended one, will function until the next session of the UNESCO General Conference (October 1999), when the statutes of the institute will be formally adopted and its governing board formally appointed.

3. The primary reason for establishing an international institute for statistics is to enable UNESCO to provide dynamic and effective responses to the ever-increasing demands that emanate from member States and the international community as a whole for more diversified, more policy-relevant and more reliable statistical products and services in UNESCO's fields of competence: education, science and technology, and culture and communication.

4. The mission of the institute is to provide statistical information which will help decision-making in member States and thereby enhance policy and programme development. Under this mission, member States would be the prime but not the only beneficiary of the institute's action in the field of statistical information. Apart from the UNESCO programme sectors, there are other constituencies whose tasks are to help decision-making in UNESCO's fields of competence and whose information needs should be served, such as the national statistics bureaux, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, regional intergovernmental organizations, development agencies, international research institutes and others. The institute will coordinate with other entities engaged in similar or complementary activities to reduce the likelihood of wasteful duplication and to take greater advantage of resources.

5. There are four important implications which flow from this updated definition of UNESCO's mission: (a) the institute will need to establish which statistics are policy relevant and which are not; (b) it will need to be responsive and flexible in defining and developing data and indicators; (c) it will need to ensure that the data which it collects and makes available are reliable, sufficiently accurate for its purposes and up to date; and (d) the processes for defining, collecting, analysing and presenting statistics must be subject to strong and objective quality assurance.

6. To fulfil its mission, the institute's efforts must focus on three core objectives:

(a) To foster the development of international statistics in its fields of interest in ways which reflect the changing policy contexts in those fields, and which are reliable, robust and feasible to collect;

(b) To arrange for the collection, production, analysis and timely dissemination of policy-relevant statistics and indicators based on this development work;

(c) To support the development of the statistical and analytical capacities of member States both for their own purposes and also as a contribution to the achievement of the previous objective.

7. According to the strategy decided by the Director-General to ensure the transition from the current UNESCO Division to the international institute, the appointment of the Director of the institute (D-2 level) was one of the most urgent tasks. Therefore, the Director-General issued a vacancy announcement inviting all member States to submit candidates. The 35 candidates who applied for the post were evaluated by the members of the Steering Committee, who subsequently submitted their final recommendations to the Director-General. After consulting the UNESCO Executive Board, the Director-General decided to appoint Denise Lievesley (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as Director of the institute.

8. Measures have also been taken to speed up the renewal of staff within the current UNESCO Division of Statistics. Of the 30 established posts, it is expected that one third will have been vacated by the end of the first quarter of 1999,

which opens reasonable prospects for renewing the skills and competence needed to strengthen UNESCO's statistical services.

9. A transitional work programme has been prepared for 1999, through which the institute will also continue to ensure the basic statistical services usually provided by the Division. The reconfiguration of the current work programme has two purposes. The first is to document the current processes used by the Division for collecting, validating, analysing, storing and disseminating statistics; the second is to put the activities retained on to a project basis for their future planning, management and control.